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Fighting for Their Rights: Indian Women and the British Suffragette Movement

The final decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning decades of the twentieth century witnessed numerous movements concerning civil rights, social rights, independence movements, and new waves of political philosophy. Two prominent movements in Britain and its empire during the close of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century were the Women's Suffrage Movement, which had the goal of the enfranchisement of women, and the Indian Nationalist Movement, which sought India's independence from the British Empire. Although at first glance it can seem that these movements would have no influence on each other, this was not entirely true. Several Indian nationalists had close ties to or views on the Women's Suffrage Movement; in fact, several female Indian nationalists traveled to England to participate in the suffrage efforts. This paper will examine the influence of Indian women on the Suffragette Movement in early twentieth-century Britain.

By the early twentieth century, the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain included different strands—most notably, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and Women's Social and Political Union. The members of the Women's Social and Political Union, known as the suffragettes, were much more militant than the suffragists of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. The suffragettes relied on demonstrations, protests, and hunger strikes to fight for increased political and social rights for British women, particularly the right to vote. This right was eventually granted in a limited form through the Representation of the People Act of 1918, which gave all married women over the age of thirty, who owned at least five pounds worth of property, the right to vote. The 1918 bill, in other words, primarily

extended the franchise to “white” women of British citizenship, as few “non-white” British women met the property qualifications.

Despite this exclusion, women from the colonial periphery were active in these metropolitan efforts to extend the vote and frequently cooperated with British women in the metropole. In this paper, particular attention will be paid toward the works and achievements of Sophia Duleep Singh and Emmeline Pankhurst. Singh—an Indian princess, daughter of a prominent Maharaja, and goddaughter to Queen Victoria—was an active member of the suffrage movement and the leader of the Women’s Tax Resistance League from 1909 to 1914. Pankhurst was a founder and leader of the Women’s Social and Political Union, which would become predominately known as the suffragettes. Even after the 1918 Representation of the People Act, Pankhurst continued to be a member of the Women’s Party and advocated for female equality in the public sphere. As such, the lives of these two women promise to provide a window into the interaction between the British suffragettes and the women of the Indian Nationalist Movement.

The Suffragette Movement has been studied in its historical, political, and social contexts as has the Indian Nationalist Movement. Similarly, scholars have examined the interaction between British and Indian women and their respective societies. For example, Antoinette Burton has done extensive research on the impact of British imperialism on how British women viewed Indian women. In *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture; 1865-1915*, Burton explores the middle-class feminists of British society in the waning decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning decades of the twentieth century. In particular, she examines how British feminists adopted the ideology of imperialism to justify equality for British women. This equality, however, was meant for British women alone; women in countries under colonial rule, particularly India, continued to be viewed as women under

oppressive male regimes, who needed the help of their British counterparts to achieve their own liberation.¹ In a similar vein, in “Feminism, imperialism and orientalism: the challenge of the ‘Indian woman,’” Joanna Liddle and Shirin Rai analyze the writings of two American feminists on Indian women and their place in the international feminist movement. Liddle and Rai argue that American feminists insisted in their role as the leader of the international feminist movement due to their status as part of a “superior race.” British women asserted that they had been charged with a “white woman’s burden” and were expected to be a guiding light for their non-white sisters.² Although the article deals with writings by American, not British, women, it is still useful in that it introduces the role of race in fin de siècle feminist conversations.

Much of this current scholarship on the Suffrage Movement and its connection to Indian women focuses on the views of British suffragettes toward their Indian counterparts. The suffragettes, scholars argue, emphasized their own sense of superiority to justify their leadership role in the international movement. This essay will diverge from this established, historiographical trend to examine the *cooperation* between British feminists and their Indian counterparts. By taking an in-depth look into the lives of both Indian nationalists active in the Suffragette Movement and the lives of the British suffragettes who encountered them, this essay will explore the potential influence and transference of methods or ideas between the British suffragettes and women of the Indian Nationalist Movement. More specifically, this essay seeks to address the following questions: Did female Indian nationalists who became a part of the suffragettes adopt their militant actions in the fight for Indian independence? Did the British

¹ Antoinette M. Burton *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

² Joanna Liddle, and Shirin Rai. "Feminism, imperialism and orientalism: the challenge of the ‘Indian woman’." *Womens History Review* 7, no. 4 (1998): 495-520. doi:10.1080/09612029800200379.

suffragettes take note of how Indian Nationalists conducted themselves in their campaign for independence and either try to follow their example or consciously go in a different direction? Would figures such as Sophia Duleep Singh, who created their own groups within the suffragette movement, have any influence on suffragette leaders such as Emmeline Pankhurst?

This essay examines the methods used by the Suffragettes to push their agenda forward and how the Indian Nationalist Movement, particularly its female members, adopted and adapted these methods. In particular, I examine the varied opinions and reports from Conservatives and Liberals towards the Suffragettes and the Indian Nationalist Movement. While Liberals and Conservatives came to accept and partially support the ideology held by the Suffragettes, neither party showed acceptance or approval of several of the more extreme methods used by the Suffragettes such as hunger strikes in prisons. Members of the Indian Nationalist Movement used similar methods which drew similar disapproval from those in power in Britain. Drawing from the writings of Pankhurst and the political responses to the methods employed by the Suffragettes this essay argues that members Indian Nationalist Movement adopted protest methods from the Suffragettes.

Beginnings of the British Feminist Movement

Versions of feminism had existed in the British Isles for many centuries, with Mary Wollstonecraft being considered the grandmother of British feminism.³ Regardless of Wollstonecraft's writings and ideologies, by the nineteenth century women, still did not hold many of the rights that were held by their male counterparts, particularly the right to vote. Women who owned property on the Isle of Man were enfranchised in 1881 after a series of

³ "History of the Feminist Movement in Britain", HE+, University of Cambridge 2018, <http://www.myheplus.com/subjects/sociology/history-feminist-movement-britain>, 6 October 2018

speeches by suffragette leader Lydia Becker garnered support from the local government.⁴ Yet on mainland Britain, women still faced heavy civil and social restrictions. Frustrations and disagreements with these restrictions lead to the formation of loosely affiliated feminist groups with several consolidating into major organizations such as the Women's Franchise League.

By the late nineteenth century, many of these groups turned their attention to the enfranchisement of British women. For example, one such group of women created a petition in 1866 for granting women the same rights as men; the related bill, however, was defeated in Parliament 196 to 73.⁵ In 1897, seventeen of these groups consolidated into the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Fawcett. Members of the NUWSS, later known as Suffragists, campaigned for enfranchisement via peaceful means and efforts to educate the public on why women deserved the same rights afforded to men. The NUWSS would hand out leaflets and petitions and hold public meetings intended to educate the public. Regardless, there were those who believed that the NUWSS's methods would not be able to achieve enfranchisement for women due to not garnering enough attention for the cause.

Those who viewed the methods of the NUWSS as being too soft and not effective soon became disillusioned with the organization. In 1903, six years after the NUWSS was formed, Emmeline Pankhurst along with her daughters Christabel and Sylvia formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Starting as a founder and member of the Women's Franchise League in 1889 along with her husband Richard, Pankhurst campaigned for married women's right to vote. These campaigns led to an amendment being added to the 1894 Local Government

⁴ Votes for Women!, The Official Isle of Man Government Website, Crown Copywrite, December 5th, 2017; <https://www.gov.im/news/2017/dec/05/votes-for-women/>, 6 October 2018

⁵ British Library Learning, "Who were the suffragists and suffragettes, and what are the key differences between them?", *BritishLibrary.com*, February 6th, 2018; <https://www.bl.uk/votes-for-women/articles/suffragists-and-suffragettes>, 9 October 2018

Act which, allowed some women the right to vote in local government elections.⁶ Despite the relative success of the amendment to the Local Government Act, the Women's Franchise League would fall apart shortly after. Following the dissolution of the Women's Franchise League, Pankhurst created the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903, after several years as a member of the Independent Labour Party. Pankhurst established the WSPU in part due to her beliefs that the pacifistic methods employed by the WFL and the earlier Suffragists had not been successful in getting involvement from politicians and genuine legislation that supported women.

The Women's Social and Political Union, while still having the same goal of women's enfranchisement as its predecessor, took a much more militant approach. Pankhurst and other members of the WSPU believed that to gain more rights for women, they could not always work within the confines of what was legal and would have to force their voices to be heard. As Pankhurst later explained in *My Own Story*: "Deeds, not words, was to be our permanent motto".⁷ These women, quickly referred to as Suffragettes, were known for their militant and direct approaches to pushing their agenda. Throughout the 1910s the Suffragettes would become known throughout Britain for their protests, speeches, demonstrations, and disruptions of the public.⁸ These demonstrations of civil disobedience kept the Suffragettes in the news and minds of the British public and political leaders. Despite being known for their militancy, the WSPU was not militant from its creation. Protests and demonstrations were non-violent in nature for the first two years of the WSPU's existence. This changed on May 12, 1905, when the Suffragettes conducted a loud protest outside the Parliament building in response to the filibuster of a bill for

⁶ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The militant suffrage movement: citizenship and resistance in Britain, 1860-1930*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 51.

⁷ Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (1914); Project Gutenberg E-Book 2011; 38

⁸ British Library Learning, "Who were the suffragists and suffragettes, and what are the key differences between them?"

women's suffrage. Acknowledged by both the police and the Parliamentary members at the filibuster, Pankhurst stated: "We are at last recognized as a political party; we are now in the swim of politics, and are a political force."⁹ This was a turning point for the WSPU, after which it was fully committed to the use of militant methods even if they resulted in violence.

This commitment to actions, not words, allowed the Women's Social and Political Union to set itself apart from its predecessor organizations. As leader of the WSPU, Pankhurst advocated for militant means of civil disobedience that brought about multiple clashes with the police and the government. Methods that Pankhurst advocated were protests and demonstrations that frequently ended with violent clashes with the police and multiple Suffragettes being arrested and imprisoned. During these imprisonments, Pankhurst continued to protest, leading the other Suffragettes in organized hunger strikes. These hunger strikes garnered media attention on the national level as the strikes attracted the attention of newspapers. These hunger strikes were occasionally used as bartering tools, and the imprisoned Suffragettes claimed they would end their hunger strike if Parliament would introduce bills endorsing or asking for women's suffrage:

Mrs. Pankhurst, who spoke at [the] demonstration in Manchester on Saturday, organised by the Women's Social and Political Union, in honour [of] the 141 Ancoehiro suffragists lately released from Liverpool and Manchester prisons, said the hunger strike would cease if Mr. Asquith would promise to introduce a Women's Suffrage Bill into Parliament next session; otherwise it would [be] on, and the attempts of the Government to break it down would fail.¹⁰

In response to these hunger strikes prison officials often force-fed Suffragettes which could lead to both physical and psychological injuries. News of the forced feedings and the damage that resulted spread through first hand-accounts in newspapers and through word of mouth.

⁹ June Purvis. *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*. London: Routledge, 2002., 88-89

¹⁰ "HUNGER STRIKES. THE LAST REMEDY OF THE OPPRESSED" *Nottingham Evening Post* 4 October 1909: Pg 3. *British Newspaper Archive* Web. 10 October 2018

Despite mixed opinions on the hunger strikes, news of the injuries and mistreatment that came from force feedings garnered sympathy and outcry from the public for the plight of the Suffragettes. These reports did not necessarily generate complete support for their cause, however. In an attempt to avoid having to resort to force feeding prisoners Parliament passed the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act in 1913, which allowed for the release of severely malnourished prisoners with the understanding that they would return to prison to finish their sentence once they became healthy enough.¹¹ The Act succeeded in preventing continued negative public opinion about the Suffragettes' conditions; not all released Suffragettes returned to prison once they were able, however.

Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters became some of the most well-known women's rights activists of their time. Their notoriety led to other prominent feminists adopting similar methods and ideals. One such person was Sophia Duleep Singh, the daughter of an Indian Maharaja and a goddaughter of Queen Victoria. Duleep Singh became a prominent Suffragette and a good friend of Emmeline Pankhurst, from whom she adopted her own ideology. Duleep Singh became well-known for her refusal to pay taxes and her leadership in the Tax Resistance League (TRL). The basis for the TRL's refusal to pay taxes was that women were not required to pay taxes if they did not possess full rights similar to men.¹² Duleep Singh was taken to court multiple times for her refusal to pay taxes where she repeatedly stated "when the women of England are enfranchised and the State acknowledges me as a citizen I shall, of course, pay my share of its upkeep."¹³

Methods and Opinions

¹¹ "HUNGER STRIKING", *The Diss Express and Norfolk and Suffolk Journal* 28 March 1913:

¹² "PRINCESS WHO WON'T PAY TAXES" *Berks and Oxon Advertiser* 02 January 1914: *British Newspaper Archive* Web. 11 October 2018

¹³ "PRINCESS WHO WON'T PAY TAXES", 11 October 2018

While their militant methods made the Suffragettes well-known, hunger strikes, protests, and damage of public property were not without their consequences. Their methods garnered significant press coverage for their cause; this was particularly true of the hunger strikes that they organized while imprisoned for their violent protests. While imprisoned Suffragettes often turned to hunger strikes as a protest method, non-imprisoned Suffragettes simultaneously participated in demonstrations, protests, damage to public property, and marches to the residences of prominent politicians. These methods were done in public and shaped both private and public opinions. What received the most press, however, were the hunger strikes undertaken in prisons and the subsequent force-feedings of the prisoners who organized and participated in them.

In the beginning years of the WSPU, its members would advocate for and participate in acts of civil disobedience to attract the attention of those in power. These acts lead to frequent clashes with police, which at times became violent and resulted in the arrests of Suffragettes.¹⁴ The WSPU engaged in the destruction of both private and public property and intentionally selected their targets for symbolic purposes. Buildings and property owned by prominent politicians or public arenas like museums became frequent targets. For example, on April 9, 1914, a Suffragette named Clara Lambert, who also went by Mary Stewart, destroyed several pieces of the Oriental Pottery collection, which were displayed at the British Museum and chosen for their popularity.¹⁵ Destruction of property garnered public disapproval for the Suffragettes, but all press, positive and negative, provided a means for the Suffragettes to raise awareness of their cause.

¹⁴ "Suffragette Riot: Police Use Batons at Leith", *South Wales Daily News* 06 December 1909; pg 5

¹⁵ "More Suffragette Damage: British Museum Pottery Collection Damaged"; *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 11 April 1914; pg 5

Regardless, even in the militant WSPU, there was disagreement among members about how far was too far when it came to their methods. There were those who viewed the destruction done by their fellow members as damaging to the cause. They argued that such actions gave the Suffragettes a reputation for violence, which might discourage political support.¹⁶ For example Emmeline Pankhurst's own daughter, Sylvia Pankhurst criticized the methods undertaken by her mother, sister, and their followers and complained of their refusals to listen to any dissenting opinions: "Her glorification of autocracy seemed to me remote indeed from the struggle we were waging, the grim fight even now proceeding in the cells. I thought of many others who had been thrust aside for some minor difference."¹⁷ Sylvia's disapproval of her mother and sister's methods would lead to her expulsion from the WSPU and the formation of East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS).

Despite mixed opinions on the destruction of property, most Suffragettes agreed with the use of hunger strikes to continue protesting while imprisoned. They would refuse to eat any food brought to them by guards and would continue to refuse food even when threatened with violence. These hunger strikes often started shortly after their imprisonment. Lack of food made the women weak and unable to do the hard labor sentences to which many of them were sentenced. But, it was not only their inability to work that forced the guards' hands, the threat of death by starvation also proved effective.

In response to the hunger strikes, the guards worked with doctors to restrain and forcibly feed the prisoners to prevent starvation. These forced feedings left those who endured them with both physical and psychological scars. Victims of force-feeding wrote to other members of the

¹⁶ E. Sylvia Pankhurst; *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement*; (Sturgis & Walton Company, New York 1931); <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/54955>

¹⁷ Pankhurst; *The Suffragette*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/54955>.

WSPU who would then publish the letters allowing the public to discover what was occurring. Victims described the force feeding as torture, which resulted in lingering health problems.¹⁸ Some such injuries were permanent back problems from being tied to chairs during the feedings and breathing problems from the forcible insertion of tubes down noses and throats. Lady Constance Bulwer-Lytton was an extreme example of the consequences of force-feedings. Beginning in 1910, following her arrest while disguised as a working-class woman, Bulwer-Lytton was force-fed eight times. The continued forcible placement of a tube up her nose led to breathing problems which cause Bulwer-Lytton's health to deteriorate rapidly.¹⁹ She suffered a heart attack in August 1910 and a series of strokes that left her paralyzed; she never fully recovered.

Once letters and first-person reports were released public opinion turned to anger and disgust over the brutal conditions. Faced with worries about possible deaths and growing public anger over the treatment and resulting injuries, Parliament rushed to find a solution. The answer was the passage of the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act of 1913, which permitted the release of prisoners that were too ill and required them to return to prison once they were healthy. In response, the Suffragettes began to adopt hunger strikes the moment they were imprisoned, leading to short imprisonments and quick releases with no intention of returning to prison.

While many Suffragettes used varying severities of extremism when it came to protest, few reached the height of the final act of Emily Davison. On June 8th, 1913, Davison a militant member of the WSPU became one of the most famous Suffragettes for her final shocking act of

¹⁸ Constance Lytton. *Prison and Prisoners*. (London: WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 1914.) Accessed October 17, 2018. <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/writers.html>.; Chapter X-XI

¹⁹ Lytton, *Prison and Prisoners*, Chapter VIII

protest for women's right to vote. Davison joined the WSPU in its third year; originally, she was a part-time member, but became a full-time member in either 1908 or 1910. She eventually became one of its campaign organizers and a well-known face at Suffragette demonstrations. Steadily, Davison built a reputation not only with the police and politicians, but also within the WSPU itself. In 1931 Sylvia Pankhurst recalled Davison as being: "one of the most daring and reckless of the militants."²⁰ These traits found Davison on the bad side of both the police and the leaders of the WSPU, who often complained that she was too daring and unwilling to listen to others. Davison organized rogue demonstrations and campaigns without permission of WSPU leaders, earning her both their admiration and their ire.

One of Davison's protests involved her entering and hiding within the Palace of Westminster to avoid being included in the census. She argued that she should not be included on the census, if she did not possess the full rights of a British citizen. Davison remained in a cupboard for most of the night before her presence was discovered and reported by a cleaner.²¹ Arrested, but not charged, Davison would only be included in the census twice and only because her landlady reported her as tenant. Arrested and imprisoned multiple times on various charges ranging from obstruction to assault to causing damage to public property, Davison continued her protests while imprisoned and became one of the multiple Suffragettes force-fed in prison due to their hunger strikes.²² At the time of her death, there were claims that she had endured close to fifty force-feedings over the course of eight prison sentences.

²⁰ Sylvia Pankhurst; *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals*; Green Longmans, London 1931; http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:gerritsen&rft_dat=xri:gerritsen:bookfulltext:Gerritsen-G2137

²¹ "A Night in Guy Fawkes Cupboard."; *Votes for Women*, St. Clement's Press; 07 April 1911; pg 411

²² *The Suffrage Annual And Women's Who's Who*. London: S. Paul & Co., 1913.

Hunger strikes were not the only form of protest that Davison undertook while in prison. Along with her fellow prisoners, Davison was subjected to force-feedings in response to her refusal to eat. Davison wrote letters and newspaper articles about the force-feedings. In one such account, she stated that the force-feedings “will haunt me with its horror all my life and is almost indescribable. ... The torture was barbaric.”²³ While serving one month’s hard labor at Strangeways Prison in Manchester in 1909, Davison used prison furniture to barricade herself into her cell which lead to guards attempting to flood the cell to force her to move the furniture and allow them to enter. Despite the threat to her life, Davison refused to move the furniture and remained in the cell until the guards were able to break down the door.²⁴

Emily Davison’s most famous method of protest was also her last. On June 4th, 1913, Davison entered the Epsom Derby with two flags in the WSPU colors of purple, white, and green.²⁵ During the home straight of the race when Anmer, the racehorse of King George V, got close to where she was standing, Davison climbed over the guard rail separating spectators from the track and was hit by the horse. People have debated what occurred when the horse struck Davison; some argued that she was hit and simply fell to the ground, whereas others claimed that when the horse fell from the impact, Davison received a blow to the head. The surgeon who operated on her later stated that he found no evidence of a blow to the head.²⁶ Four days after being knocked unconscious from the impact, Davison died from her injuries without regaining consciousness. Once her death was announced, both her fellow activists and the public inquired into the cause of her death, questioning if it was purely an accident or a deliberate suicide. The

²³ Carolyn Collette, *In the Thick of the Fight: The Writing of Emily Wilding Davison, Militant Suffragette*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. 2013; pg 133

²⁴ “Writes Issued”; *The Western Times*. 20 November 1909; pg 4

²⁵ "Davison, Emily Wilding (1872–1913), Suffragette | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography." (1872–1913), *Suffragette | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. November 17, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37346#>.

²⁶ Michael Tanner, *The Suffragette Derby*. (London: Robson Press, 2013.) Electronic.; pg 278

cause of her death was revealed after her funeral and was ruled to have been caused by a skull fracture resulting from the impact of the racehorse.²⁷

Thousands of women and men attended, Emily Davison's funeral procession on June 14th, before her burial the next day at a church in Morpeth. Both Davison's contemporaries and scholars today have debated whether Davison meant to purposely end her life when she went to the derby or if it was an unfortunate result of her attempt to drape one of the flags in her possession across the horse. Even those closest to Davison, such as Emmeline Pankhurst, did not truly know the reasoning behind Davison's actions – although Pankhurst suspected that Davison believed the only way for the movement to gain more momentum was if there was a martyr to rally around.²⁸ Whatever Davison's reason her famous jump only further divided both public and private opinion about the Suffragette movement.

Suffragette methods and ideology not only split the opinions of their fellow feminists and women's rights activists, but also those of the politicians whose support they desired. (Along with press coverage came attention from politicians who either agreed or disagreed with their ideology or methods.) Extreme methods of protest divided politicians on how to respond to the Suffragettes and how to go forward concerning support for the movement. Both sides of the political spectrum maintained opinions about the Suffragettes and their militant methods. Regardless of disapproval or approval, however, several politicians spoke out against the treatment of the activists while they were imprisoned and argued that their treatment crossed a line. Keir Hardie, the leader of the Labour Party, for example, spoke out against force-feeding. He argued that the practice was barbaric and unnecessary despite what the guards and prison officials claimed.

²⁷ "The Suffragist Outrage at the Derby". *The Times*. 11 June 1913. p. 15.

²⁸ Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, pg 315

Opinions of politicians remained mixed when it came to the Suffragettes. Some approved of the cause but disapproved of the methods undertaken; others disapproved of both the cause and the methods. Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald fell into the former category; he believed in the Suffragette cause, but opposed the use of violence, commenting:

I have no objection to revolution, if it is necessary but I have the very strongest objection to childishness masquerading as revolution, and all that one can say of these window-breaking expeditions is that they are simply silly and provocative. I wish the working women of the country who really care for the vote ... would come to London and tell these pettifogging middle-class damsels who are going out with little hammers in their muffs that if they do not go home, they will get their heads broken.²⁹

Winston Churchill, on the other hand, fell into the latter category and disapproved of both the cause and the methods. According to Churchill women were "...well represented by their fathers, brothers, and husbands" and "The women's suffrage movement is only the small edge of the wedge, if we allow women to vote it will mean the loss of social structure and the rise of every liberal cause under the sun."³⁰

The force-feedings of the Suffragettes resulted in overwhelmingly negative press and widespread public criticism.³¹ Even those who approved of the imprisonment of the protestors and demonstrators did not show complete agreement with the forced feeding of those undergoing hunger strikes. The leader of the Labor Party, James Keir Hardie, stood before Parliament to contest the treatment of the Suffragettes in prison, bringing up Emily Davison and demanding to know what would occur to those who had inflicted the forced-feedings.³² In response to harsh public opinion condemning the force-feedings, Parliament passed the Prisoners (Temporary

²⁹ David Marquand . *Ramsay MacDonald* (1977) Jonathan Cape Ltd; 1st Edition; page 148

³⁰ Winston Churchill. "Letter to Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith." Received by Herbert Asquith, Great Britain, 21 Dec. 1911, Great Britain. <http://www.churchillarchive.com/collection-highlights/churchill-and-women>

³¹ "The Government's Suffragette Muddle", *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 02 July 1912; pg 5

³² "Prisoner Released: Home Office Inquiry", *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 29 October 1909; pg 5

Discharge for Ill Health) Act 1913, permitting the temporary release of hunger striking prisoners for health reasons with the stipulation that they would return to prison once they became healthy enough. The Act quickly came to be referred to as the Cat and Mouse Act due its lack of means to ensure that the released prisoners returned once their health improved. Indeed, many did not return to prison until they were re-arrested for new crimes. Once re-imprisoned, the Suffragettes would resume their hunger strikes, leading to their release under the act, only to be arrested again later – creating a cycle of arrest, release, and re-arrest. This cycle did not help improve public opinion for either the Suffragettes or Parliament; instead the public viewed the Suffragettes as avoiding consequences and Parliament as unable to enforce its own Act or control its citizens.

When the Suffragettes attempted to get legislation passed through Parliament, they often looked to the Labour Party, a left-leaning political party that had been formed in the recent decades and had begun to gain traction in the House of Commons. Before the formation of the WSPU, the Pankhurst family had been involved with the Labour Party; Richard Pankhurst was a member and Emmeline was also closely tied to the organization despite being denied membership due to her gender. It was in the Labour Party that the WSPU found some of its greatest male allies, including James Keir Hardie the Labour Party's founder and first Parliamentary leader. Hardie would frequently bring to Parliament the issues that were being presented by the Suffragettes and would more frequently bring these up once force-feeding and the harsh treatments of prison became public knowledge.³³ Similarly, in November 1912 George Lansbury resigned his seat in Parliament to further his campaigns for women's rights, which he believed his fellow Labour colleagues did not focus on enough.³⁴ The next year, after he was

³³John Simkin. "James Keir Hardie." *Spartacus Educational*, Spartacus Educational, spartacus-educational.com/PRhardie.htm.

³⁴ "GEORGE LANSBURY M.P. WILL RESIGN"; *Dundee Courier* 12 November 1912; pg 4

arrested for a speech supporting violent methods of protest, Lansbury joined his fellow activists in prison. Furthermore, he went on hunger strike and was released from prison under the Cat and Mouse Act. Lansbury, of course, was an extreme example of support from those in the Labour Party; most party members remained in government positions and simply introduced legislation to legalize women's suffrage.

Other women's rights groups, such as the East London Federation of Suffragettes, and politicians who supported the cause of women's suffrage encouraged those concerned by Suffragette efforts to recognize that the WSPU was one part of a much larger movement. In a letter to the editor of the *Yorkshire Post*, a conservative leaning newspaper, a member of the public wrote that "surely any individual with balanced reason should be as little influenced against the cause of women's suffrage by the disapproved action of the few as he should be moved in its favor by such action."³⁵ Politicians from all points of the political spectrum maintained opinions on the Suffragettes and their methods of protests and members of various political parties pledged their support for the Suffragette cause. Not only did British politicians form opinions about the Suffragettes and the methods they used but so did prominent political figures and activists from the British colonies. Independence activists in India in particular would have mixed opinions about the Suffragettes and their methods, as they as continued to protest British rule of the Indian subcontinent.

Indian Nationalist Movement

While the Suffragettes were fighting for women's suffrage in England, on the other side of the British Empire another movement was continuing its fight to be recognized. Throughout

³⁵ "The Government's Suffragette Muddle", *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 02 July 1912

the latter half of the nineteenth century, Indians resisted the British presence on the subcontinent. In May 1857, for example, Indian soldiers under the command of the East India Company British army mutinied against their British commanders in Meerut after several sepoys had been imprisoned for refusing to use the new Enfield rifles. The resulting uprising spread throughout India and was met with swift retaliation from the British. In many ways, the uprising ended in failure for the Indians. While Company rule of India ended it was not replaced by Indian rule, but instead by the British Raj, or direct rule of India by the British crown. Despite some improved conditions in the aftermath of the rebellion, this transfer to Crown rule, also encouraged of Indian nationalism. Beginning in 1885, the Indian nationalist movement gained coherence and organization from the development of the Indian Nationalist Congress. By the 1910s, the movement had gained much traction and visibility, although it would be another thirty years before British rule would end over the subcontinent.

Although the movement for Indian independence and the campaigns for enfranchisement of women would appear to be worlds apart, they were in fact not as far apart as one would think. The two movements encountered each other during the 1910s, when several Indian independence activists traveled to Britain to appeal for their cause. One of these activists was Mahatma Gandhi, and during his visit, he witnessed first-hand the campaigns and lengths that the Suffragettes had been willing to go to advocate their cause. His first encounter with the suffragette movement was in 1906, when he traveled to Britain to campaign for the rights of those displaced and those remaining in South Africa in the wake of the Bambatha Rebellion. During this time, the Suffragettes held several street protests in London near where Gandhi was campaigning. In response, Gandhi commented: "Today the whole country is laughing at them, and they have only a few people on their side. But undaunted, these women work on steadfast in

their cause. They are bound to succeed and gain the franchise, for the simple reason that deeds are better than words.”³⁶³⁷ The Suffragettes willingness to be arrested and imprisoned for their cause inspired Gandhi who hoped to see similar willingness in Indians oppressed by racial discrimination. If peaceful resolution could not be avoided, then Gandhi and his fellow activists became willing to be imprisoned for their beliefs, much like the Suffragettes. The women’s struggle for enfranchisement which Gandhi witnessed while in Britain, later influenced his own opinions about suffrage in India.

Despite his admiration for the Suffragettes, Gandhi did not support their use of violent methods to bring notice to their cause. When Gandhi first encounter the WSPU in 1906 the organization had only entered its third year of existence and was still using relatively non-violent methods of protest. At this point, they primarily used demonstrations, marches, and public speeches to inform the public of their cause and attempted to arrange meetings with politicians to encourage the introduction of legislation. Gandhi pointed to this use of non-violence as an example to his fellow Indian activists and a means to promote satyagraha.³⁸ Satyagraha, or holding on to truth or truth force, he explained, “excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and, therefore, not competent to punish”.³⁹ The use of violent methods would only bring about the disappearance of whatever sympathy the movement had gained through its previous demonstrations. Even with his disapproval towards violent methods, Gandhi did adapt some of the Suffragette protest methods to his idea of satyagraha and

³⁶ Mohandas K. Gandhi. *Indian Opinion*, November 1906;
<http://gandhimuseum.org/MGM/INDIAN%20OPINION.htm>

³⁷ Ramachandra Guha. “How the Suffragettes Influenced Mahatma Gandhi.” *Hindustan Times*, 24 Feb. 2018,
www.hindustantimes.com/columns/how-the-suffragettes-influenced-mahatma-gandhi/story-d64CKd7REk1AF41JQdUtfN.html.

³⁸ “Mahatma Gandhi.” *Anti-Suffrage | The Suffragettes*, Aurora Metro Press, www.thesuffragettes.org/map/london-boroughs/hammersmith-fulham/mahatma-gandhi/.

³⁹ Mahatma Gandhi, *Selected Political Writings*, Ed. Dennis Dalton, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. (1996): 50-75

would use these adapted methods within his own protests. For example, Gandhi turned to fasting to advocate for Indian independence and to show his disapproval for the violence adopted by some Indian independence groups resorted to.

While the Suffragettes were most famous for their hunger strikes this method of political protest was not unique to them. During the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Russian revolutionaries arrived in Great Britain while fleeing retaliation in their home country. With them, they brought stories of hunger strikes held by Russian political prisoners in protest of oppressive conditions.⁴⁰ Stories of these hunger strikes spread throughout Britain during the 1890s and became a basis for the Suffragettes' adoption of the technique. Many Suffragettes, including Emmeline Pankhurst, were sympathetic towards these Russian revolutionaries and would form close political ties with those who resided in London.⁴¹ Identifying with those who had been imprisoned in Russia for their political ideology, certain Suffragettes, such as Marion Wallace Dunlop, decided to adopt hunger strikes as means to have themselves identified as political prisoners.⁴²

Gandhi and his followers also adopted hunger strikes as a method of political protest which fell under the acceptable bounds of satyagraha. During Gandhi's time in England, the Suffragettes had begun to go on hunger strikes, although the practice remained limited compared to later years. Even with this small percentage, Suffragette hunger strikes generated a response from the British government and caught the attention of Gandhi. Gandhi undertook his first fast in 1913, the same year Parliament passed the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health)

⁴⁰ Kevin Grant, "British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 53, no. 01, 2011, pp. 113–143., doi:10.1017/s0010417510000642.

⁴¹ Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*

⁴² Kevin Grant, "The Transcolonial World of Hunger Strikes and Political Fasts, c. 1909-1935," *Decentring Empire: Britain, India, and the Transcolonial World*, edited by Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy (Orient Longman, 2006), pp. 243-69.

Act. The first two of Gandhi's fasts would be penitential fasts; he did not begin political fasts until March 1918. Although Gandhi's first political fast would occur four years after the first Suffragette hunger strike, other Indian activists adopted the method of hunger strikes earlier.

Gandhi was not the only Indian nationalist who admired the Suffragettes. In fact, others were directly involved in the movement. Sophia Duleep Singh, for example, became a prominent member of the Suffragette movement and traveled frequently back to India where she attempted to encourage Indian women to follow their example. Originally born in Elveden, England to Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last ruler of the Sikh Empire, Duleep Singh was exposed to Indian nationalist ideals by her father. During his preteens, Maharaja Duleep Singh abdicated his throne and conceded his empire to Britain, where he would be exiled when he was fifteen years old. Despite failed attempts to travel to India in the 1890s, Duleep Singh succeeded in entering India several times between 1903 and 1909. During one of her final trips in 1909, she encountered several major players in the Indian nationalist movement as it began to gain momentum.⁴³ Through her conversations and meetings with Indian nationalists, Duleep Singh began to have changing opinions about the only homeland that she had known. But it was the arrest and imprisonment of Lala Lajpat Rai on sedition charges that completed her turn against the British Empire.

Upon returning to England, Duleep Singh continued to express her interests in expanding the rights of women and the rights of those living under colonial rule. In 1909, Duleep Singh met Una Dugdale, a Suffragette and marriage reformer who made national news for refusing to say "obey" during her wedding vows.⁴⁴ Dugdale was a close friend of the Pankhurst family and a

⁴³ Carolyn Kellogg, "'Sophia' a Fascinating Story of a Princess Turned Revolutionary," *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 9 Jan. 2015, www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-anita-anand-20150111-story.html.

⁴⁴ "SUFFRAGIST WEDDING". *North West Post (Formby, Tas.: 1887 - 1916)*. 1912-03-06. p. 3. Retrieved 2017-10-24. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/202356306>

member of the WSPU and convinced Duleep Singh to join the organization.⁴⁵ Duleep Singh would become a prominent member of the WSPU although she would not get the same press as the Pankhursts and Davison. The press, both positive and negative, were drawn to Duleep Singh due to her position as a goddaughter of Queen Victoria, who participated in helping house and educate her in the aftermath of the deaths of her parents.

During her early years as a WSPU member, Duleep Singh did not maintain as high of a profile as her fellow Suffragettes and rarely spoke at WSPU meetings or in public because, she claimed, she was “quite useless for that sort of thing”. Duleep Singh even kept a low profile and was relatively silent about her Suffragette affiliation during a 1911 trip to India, only wearing a small “Votes for Women” badge.⁴⁶ But remembering the state of her fellow Indians and what had happened to her father, Duleep Singh did not remain silent and passive for long. Instead, she eventually joined her fellow Suffragettes in their militant ways. Little more than a year after joining the WSPU, Duleep Singh, alongside Emmeline Pankhurst and other Suffragettes, approached the Prime Minister and were removed from the House of Commons. The effort lead to a violent clash with police and became known as Black Friday.⁴⁷ Many of the 300 Suffragettes who had joined the march were physically and sexually assaulted by police officers and many found themselves under arrest. The violence she witnessed that day only strengthened Duleep Singh’s resolve to fight for the rights of women and others whose rights were denied.

While in India, Duleep Singh witnessed and spoke to Indian nationalists such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Lala Lajpat Rai and attended a farewell party for Mahatma Gandhi where

⁴⁵ “Princess Sophia Duleep Singh.” *Martin Luther King Jr. - History's HEROES from E2BN*, East of England Broadband Network, historysheroes.e2bn.org/hero/timeline/3521.

⁴⁶ Sumita Mukherjee and Rehana Ahmed. *South Asian Resistances in Britain 1858-1947*. A&C Black, 2011.; pg 112

⁴⁷ Georgiana Margaret Soloman. *Black Friday. Black Friday, Votes for Women*, 1911. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/black-friday-pamphlet>

she began to learn about his ideals and ideology.⁴⁸ Home rule and independence from Britain appealed considerably to Duleep Singh largely due to her own family's misfortunes with the British government. Unlike Gandhi, however, Duleep Singh did not believe that independence and rights for women could be won with the use of non-violence. The use of methods outside what was considered peaceful and acceptable were not adequate to achieve the desired results. Violence and harsher versions of civil disobedience were necessary to maintain the public's attention and to convert the public to their cause. The events of Black Friday left an everlasting impression upon Duleep Singh, not only because of the outbreak of violence but because of the impression it made on the public.

The WSPU had been moderately present in the press but the events of Black Friday and its aftermath pushed them onto the national stage. In the aftermath of the violence and damage, the press displayed overwhelming favor for the police who had been present and showed sympathy for their injuries. According to *The Daily Mirror*: "...in one scuffle a constable got hurt and had to be led limping away by two colleagues".⁴⁹ Furthermore, the newspaper questioned the reasoning of the Suffragettes for the demonstration and blamed them for the escalation to violence, explaining: "the police displayed great good temper and tact throughout and avoided making arrests, but as usual many of the Suffragettes refused to be happy until they were arrested..."⁵⁰ The subsequent press of Black Friday was pivotal in convincing Duleep Singh that peaceful methods were not capable of making the same lasting impression as militant methods. Direction action, which allowed for WSPU members to leave quickly and avoid arrest, became

⁴⁸ "Princess Sophia Duleep Singh – Timeline". History Heroes organization.

⁴⁹ "Ninety Suffragettes Arrested". *The Daily Mirror*. 19 November 1910. p. 4.

⁵⁰ "Ninety Suffragettes Arrested". *The Daily Mirror*.

the preferred method of a portion of the Suffragettes whereas others viewed being arrested as a badge of honor.

Duleep Singh would subscribe to a mixture of the two opinions. After the events of Black Friday, she involved herself mostly in direct action, such as refusing to pay taxes, printing and handing out newspapers, and raising money for Suffragette activities. She also participated in several protests that ended in clashes with police and held the hope of being arrested with the intention of joining the prison hunger strikes. Duleep Singh was never arrested despite her involvement with violent protests. Her previous active social life within upper-class British society made her popular with members of the elite, including the royal family, and had made her recognizable to the public. Her popularity with the people made King George V and the police reluctant to arrest her for fear of her being injured either during her arrest or in prison. Many feared that if she was harmed or accidentally killed, she would become a martyr in the same vein as Emily Davison after her fatal accident.⁵¹

Conclusion

Upon entering the twentieth century, independence and rights movements within the British Empire began to become more visible and adopt more extreme methods to bring attention to their causes. The Suffragettes of the women's rights movement were one such group that turned toward extreme methods of protesting for rights for women. Hunger strikes and demonstrations that ended with property damage and frequent clashes with police became signatures of the Suffragettes. Different factions within the Women's Social and Political Union turned towards different types of protests beyond hunger strikes with varying degrees of success.

⁵¹ Anita Anand. *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary*. London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Emily Davison became a martyr to the Suffragettes when she died after attempting to drape a WSPU flag across the race horse of King George V. Sophia Duleep Singh, a goddaughter of Queen Victoria, created the Tax Resistance League whose members refused to pay taxes until women in Britain were granted equal rights to men. The violence and civil disobedience created mixed opinions about the Suffragettes and their cause, with some politicians, such as Keir Hardie, approving of both the methods and the cause and others, like Winston Churchill, disapproving of both the cause and methods.

The Suffragettes and their actions reached such heights that other movements within the British Empire would come to know of them. Indian independence activists such as Mahatma Gandhi encountered Suffragette protests during visits to Britain and became fascinated by both protest methods and the passion of the Suffragettes. Although Gandhi later expressed disapproval for the more violent and militaristic methods employed by the Suffragettes, he and his followers would follow in their foot-steps and use hunger strikes as a means of protest against the British rule of India. But not all members and supporters of Indian independence viewed violent methods as shameful and unacceptable. Sophia Duleep Singh became an active participant in protests that clashed with the police and viewed being arrested for these actions as an honor. Although later in her life Duleep Singh turned her focus primarily towards women's rights, she did not forget her homeland and those who remained there.

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